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PROPERTY CONCEPTS AMONG THE CREE OF THE ROCKS

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THE following notes concern the Cree of the Rocks, among whom the writer has worked for the last thirty-nine years. In their own language they call themselves *Assiniskawidiniwok* (*assini-* = rock, *-skao[w]-* = abundance of, many, *-idiniwok* = human beings [pl.]: "human beings [of the country where there is] an abundance of rocks"). They are called by the Plains Cree, *Assiniskawiyiniwok*; by the Swampy Cree, *Assiniskawiniwok*.

Their habitat is a hilly broken country. The lakes and rivers which form part of it are surrounded with granite cliffs. The land is wooded with pine, fir, spruce, tamarack, birch, and aspen. The streams are full of rapids and falls and flow between high rocky hills. The landscape is varied but very stern. The water of the lakes and rivers is very limpid as the bottom and shores thereof are of rock. Sand is rare, and mud is absent. There is very little grassy prairie. These clear waters are frequented by trout. Sturgeon is not found except in the Churchill and Saskatchewan rivers. The other kinds of fish,—common to all the north,—whitefish, red and white carp, doree, and pike, are found nearly everywhere, but whitefish are as a rule rather scarce with not enough of them available to meet food needs. Fur-

bearing animals, both land dwellers and water dwellers, freely sport about,—or rather, freely did so, for they have diminished considerably in numbers.

The country occupied by the Cree of the Rocks comprises a nearly rectangular area between the Saskatchewan and Churchill rivers from about 99° to 106° W. lon. and from about 53½° to 56° N. lat.

The Cree of the Rocks are a branch of the great Cree family of the Algonquian stock. Their language is distinguished among other things by the use of *d* where the Plains Cree use *y* and the Maskegon use *n*. Thus the following word written in accordance with these phonetic shifts,—*nida*, *niya*, *nina*,—has in all three dialects absolutely the same meaning. This *d* of the Cree of the Rocks is hard,—like their habitat itself. It is the ordinary English *d*, as in “do”, or “Indian”; it is not the same as either the voiced or voiceless *th* of English. The Plains Cree, of the southern part of Saskatchewan and Alberta, the most numerous division of the Cree, use the *y*-dialect; the Cree of the Rocks, of the rectangle above mentioned, the *d*-dialect; the Maskegon, or Swampy Cree around Le Pas, Lake Winnipeg, Norway House, Oxford House, God’s Lake, and so forth, the *n*-dialect. The Swampy Cree occupy all the country to the east of Lake Winnipeg as far as Hudson’s Bay, Churchill and Albany.

The Cree of the Rocks established themselves in the more or less rectangular area above described. No doubt they often tried to increase their territory. It is related that they fought with the Chipewyan at many points to which they had advanced, but that, after having suffered a defeat of the first order, they had to fall back in full retreat,—to lac Caribou (Reindeer Lake), lac Serpent (Snake Lake), and lac des Cris (Cree Lake), to mention only some of the more important points. Later on they succeeded in encroaching peacefully upon the territory of their neighbors whom sickness and other causes had weakened and who withdrew, incapable, with their small number of hunters, of further maintaining their ancient tribal territory. Thus today the Cree are mixed with the Chipewyan in these formerly disputed districts at Reindeer Lake and Cree Lake, and they are sole masters of the Snake Lake country as far as Ile à la Crosse.

LAND TENURE SYSTEM

The territory belonged to the tribe in common. It was the country of the Cree. There were no well marked divisions of it, either among families or among individuals. Theoretically, anyone at all could wander around the country and shift from one end of it to another, just as he wished. But in practise such shifts were rather rare. Ordinarily a good hunter established himself near a lake or a river and was followed by his relatives who wished to live near him. All together they constituted a group of which he was the chief or leader. Apart from his relatives, if a friend wanted to come and install himself near him, the group increased in importance, but he remained just the same the recognized, respected, and obeyed leader. At some distance, say thirty miles or about a day's march, near another lake, there might be another similar group. Thus in small scattered groups the tribe passed the winter, some of the groups living in plenty, and sometimes certain others in want. However when, for want of game or of fish, famine conditions developed at any given place, the members of the group there, if they had the strength, endeavored either to reach the nearest other group where they would be able to find assistance, or else to go and establish themselves in some other locality where the hunting would promise a better chance to make a living.

At the beginning of June, after the hunt, all these various groups of the same region got under way, left their winter quarters, and converged towards a single place of assemblage which had been decided upon the preceding summer. Here all the groups held a feast together, offered sacrifices, and talked over the events of the year. At the end of some weeks, the assemblage broke up, and each group, made up of pretty much the same members as during the preceding winter, though sometimes with a family more or less, took the trail towards its winter encampment.

Since the whole territory, thus divided up amicably among the various groups, was very extensive relatively to the total population of the band, each group had in its possession a vast extent of wooded territory. Each hunter in each group in turn took up his own section or had the chief assign such a section

to him in such manner that no one else could encroach upon his hunting territory. Whether for the securing of furs or for the hunting of food animals, each hunter kept to his own section.

The principal points where the families were more or less clustered together were lac Laronge, Pelican Narrows, Pakitawagan, Burntwood Lake, Nelson House. From these points they spread out to the other lakes or rivers in small groups of two or three families.

An unoccupied section became the hunting ground of the one who established himself on its first, and one else had the right to hunt on his trail. If another hunter came along afterwards he looked for a place to the side. The same hunter could return each year to the same territory and occupy it. He had the right to do so. But if he chose to abandon this territory in order to go take another, then the first comer could take possession of the abandoned territory.

Each one was the recognized owner of whatever he took in his traps and snares, of what he killed with bow and arrow, with gun, or by other means, but not of the other animals still at large in his section. An exception was made for beaver. The hunter who first discovered a beaver lodge became by that very fact the owner thereof. He marked the lodge by planting a stick or post, and his mark was respected by everybody. Later, after a month or a year or longer, whenever in fact he wished, he could come to kill the beaver therein and he would find them still there.

The chief of the group won his stripes by his ability as a hunter, or by his skill in making the tools and implements necessary for their manner of living, such as canoes, toboggans, and snowshoes, or by his superior strength, or by his compelling eloquence, or above all by his bravery and resourcefulness in battle.

No one sold his hunting territory. By mutual consent one hunter could exchange his hunting section with another hunter, and even a small group could exchange its lake with another neighboring group, but the right of hunting remained with the abandoned territory. Each one attained a new right respectively to the new territory to which he came. The right was attached to the land, and the occupant thereof kept this right.

However, they could not give away their territory to non-members of the tribe, without becoming traitors to their blood. This simply could not be done. It would have meant war. To friends, to relatives, they gave permission to come and live among them and to hunt,—this by courtesy.

Force decided in cases of dispute, and punished wrongs. There was no tribunal of justice, but the chief or leader of the group with his principal associates would talk over and discuss the case and would express their view in the matter. This expression of view was equivalent to a verdict and had the force of law. The guilty one recognized this without hesitation. Ordinarily no hand was laid upon him to start with; he was boycotted in order to force him to betake himself away in case he did not do so at once and voluntarily. He was not given any further aid, he had no share in anyone's food, his traps were put out of commission, his tools were sabotaged, his implements of hunting were broken. Then, seeing himself up against it, he would depart and never come back.

When the chief or leader died, the ablest of his sons took his place and had the same authority, in proportion to his qualifications. If no sons survived the dead chief, his successor could be either one of his brothers or one of his sons-in-law,—ordinarily the individual that the deceased had taken care while still living to designate in one manner or another, above all if the individual's abilities qualified him for the position.

In speaking of his hunting territory the Cree liked to designate this region by the significant expression "our home (*chez nous*)" or else "our place of residence". Sometimes they had two such "residences",—one for the winter and the other for the summer, the place for wintering and the place for fishing. "N'itittawininan", that is, "our [excl.] home".

Each group enjoyed in common, at the locality where they pitched their tents, the right of fishing, of duck hunting, and of gathering berries, and each family took all that it could. Those who had better luck than the others would, with a real family spirit, then share what they had with the poorer ones.

When traveling, each one had the right to kill, for his food needs, whatever he happened to come across. Those living in

the district which he was traversing not only did not forbid him to do this, but on the contrary did their best to aid him, and gave him all the food which they had at their disposal if he happened to be in need. These Indians were naturally very hospitable. The traveler, even the stranger, was safe among them. The law of hospitality was everywhere inviolable.

Hunting big game such as moose or caribou was one of the principal means of procuring food; and nearly always when they hunted, it was from necessity. Then they killed whatever they came across, for there was never a superabundance of food. Sometimes they spared the young of some months of age, but not always. It may be noted that the moose and the woodland caribou do not travel in large herds as do the barren-ground caribou and as did the bison of the plains. The two former animals are rather uncommon and live a more solitary life.

The furbearing animals fall into two groups: the beaver together with the muskrats, which are sedentary, and the other furbearers which are not sedentary and which travel more.

As regards the beaver, the hunters took care not to destroy them completely. When they had killed the majority of the denizens of a given lodge, ordinarily they left the rest to breed and to repair the damaged lodge. As regards the muskrat which the Indians killed in the spring, the killing ceased from the time when the females had young.

As regards, however, the other fur-bearing animals, there was no reason to spare them, since their tendency to wander led them to pass from one locality to another and to go far. But hunting for them ceased as soon as the fur lost its value, that is, when the hair shed or when the interior of the pelt turned black.

Just how did they see to it that some of the beaver in each lodge were spared? Obviously they could not always calculate with absolute accuracy, for the number of beaver to a lodge varies from one lodge to another. Sometimes the hunters left one or two or three beaver; sometimes they exterminated all in a given lodge without expressly intending to do so. When they had many traps around a lodge, it could happen that all of the beaver would be taken, and when they used the harpoon to

take the beaver it could happen that they would kill all of the beaver to the very last, thinking that some still remained alive.

Was this custom of sparing some of the beaver in each lodge as a measure of conservation inspired by older traders of the Hudson's Bay Company? It is difficult to say. It may have been that interest alone had dictated this procedure to the Indians. One reason for thinking so is that even up to our own day, in spite of the exhortations to the Indians by the agents of the trading companies to kill all the fur animals possible, the Indians resist and continue to spare some of the beaver, if not in each lodge, at least in each settlement of beaver. I have often heard them relate how they had a young beaver at the very muzzle of their gun but had not shot it, and this in order not to bring about the extermination of the race.

Up until the time when the whites came to establish permanent residence among the Indians, this custom of conservation was observed everywhere and the beaver did not decrease in number. But since the coming of the whites, the beaver have become so scarce that, to prevent their complete disappearance, the government has had to put in force rigid regulations to protect them. There exist now closed seasons during which it is prohibited to kill beaver, and this for periods of one to two and even five years. When the government declares open season and permits the killing of beaver, the present-day Indians kill all they can find, just as the whites do.

OWNERSHIP OF PERSONAL PROPERTY

Each head of a family was and still is master in his own lodge, the sole proprietor. The woman or women and the children have nothing of their own except their clothing. The father gives them things when and if he pleases. The one to whom the head of the family has given anything can dispose of it at pleasure. After a hunt a hunter would not uncommonly give a whole moose to one of the women of his lodge. She then had the exclusive right to distribute the meat to whom she pleased, without asking leave of the man. If the hunter gave a pelt, say of a fox or of a mink, to one of his children, the child could sell it and from the proceeds purchase whatever he wished.

Apart from this, everything belonged to the head of the family: guns, bow and arrows, toboggan, dogs, canoes, lodge, and all the minor household equipment.

At the death of the head of the family, his children inherited all his property. As a general rule the head of the family before his demise had himself made the partition of his property or had promised such and such a thing to such and such a person. If death overtook him unexpectedly, the partition of his property was made peaceably. At his death the survivors destroyed nothing. Formerly they interred with him his bow, his pipe and a little tobacco; at present nothing is placed either in or around the grave.

I have never heard of any individual having ownership over such things as songs, dances, myths, magical formulae, and so forth. The myths were known to everyone. Children learned them from the lips of old people. In guise of conversation or of song-making, the old men and the old women would weave together the fanciful accounts of the events of yore. The songs were also public property. No doubt, each one was free to add to his own repertoire, but from the moment he sang these songs in public those that heard them could make use of them if they could remember them. The medicine men had their own personal songs, but anyone could repeat them if his vocal organs were equal to the task. The sound of the medicine men's voice in their incantations seemed changed and no longer natural, and I am of the opinion that only ventriloquists made good medicine men.

The hunter was the undisputed owner of the animal that he killed, whether this was a caribou, a moose or a bear. The chief of the encampment had nothing to say about the game taken by other hunters of the group, except in the case of a hunter who was an orphan under the tutelage of the chief. This is still the case. But the hunter shares willingly with his neighbors the products of his labor and luck. He had the right to keep everything for himself, but out of generosity or sometimes a bit from pride he did not do so. If he kept everything for himself, the others would say nothing and would make no uncomplimentary remark, but they would consider him stingy and miserly, and

would give him nothing when they in turn would have luck in the hunt.

EXCHANGE OF GOODS

Outside of trade with the fur-trading companies, our Cree of the Rocks never had any other type of barter properly so-called either with outsiders or among themselves. They had always the laudable ambition to give service freely among relatives and neighbors, above all to come to the aid of the very least among them. They never sold anything outright one to the other; they had no type of standard currency. As a general rule they made presents to one another. Sometimes this mutual present-giving took something of the form of barter by exchange of presents. Thus, a young hunter who wished a new canoe and who was not yet capable of making one for himself would ask someone to provide one for him. In return under the guise of gratitude rather than of payment properly so-called, the young hunter would make to the other person a present of something, such as snowshoes, a bark basket, or other article. Thus this type of "exchange of presents" consisted in the interchange of two half-presents of unequal value.

On the occasion of certain feasts or dances, when many invited groups or camps would assemble together, magnificent presents were made of pelts, wearing apparel, etc. Naturally the visitors who took away these presents, had in turn to send invitations and give presents the following year to their hosts of the previous one. This custom was a symbol of friendship but it was also a matter of justice. Certainly the first givers expected a return of the favor and would consider themselves injured if they received nothing in return for their courtesy and generosity.

The Cree of the Rocks still give frequently to their relatives,—and they trace relationship very far,—many things for which they expect no payment. However one can see that there has been an evolution in their culture under the pressure of poverty and want and that they now sell among themselves more frequently than they did formerly, the things that they wish,—at prices, however, much lower than to strangers.

In asking something from one another, they have many ways of expressing themselves. They very rarely employ direct

formulae: "Give me", smacks of discourtesy among them. Instead, they say, "Lend me this", or else, "I should like to borrow this from you". Another still more subtle method is to extol or praise the thing that one wishes. Thus, you should never say to anyone: "You have a beautiful pipe", if you don't wish to possess it, for this would be the same as asking it of the owner. If you did so, he would answer as a matter of course: "Take it, it is yours". I once had an experience of this kind on the occasion of a visit to a good old pagan woman. In the course of our chat together I saw coming towards me a small white dog who want to be petted. "You have a beautiful little dog, my grandmother", I said to her, thinking to please her. "Yes", she said to me compressing her lips, "You speak Cree, it is true, but I don't want to give him to you". I excused myself as best I could, telling her I did not have the intention of asking for the dog and that I would not be able to take him with me even if she gave him to me. But I had committed an indiscretion; by my imprudent remark made without reflection I had asked outright for the little dog as a present. This method of "asking without asking" is called "speaking Cree". The natives sometimes make fun of strangers in the country who, but newly arrived, go into ecstasies over the least thing. "Oh, you already speak Cree", they say.

The Cree of the Rocks are stocky and agile. They were very robust, and still are, although less so now than in the days gone by. The severe climate and the rugged nature of their country demanded great powers of endurance and favored the highest muscular development. On their voyages they gave evidence of a marvelous skill and sang froid. They were magnificent companions and guides for travelers, very trustworthy and very straightforward. In my humble judgment they carried off the palm in former days as they do today, as drivers of dog teams in winter, as canoemen in summer, and above all as carriers on the portages.

BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD AMONG THE BALAHIS

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THE Balahis are a lower caste of weavers and day laborers in the villages of the Nimar and Hoshangabad Districts of Central India. There are about 60,000 of them in the area in question.¹ The sources of information for this paper are, first of all, a very intelligent Balahi named Gopal, who, even among his fellow Balahis has great authority in whatever pertains to caste customs and regulations. Besides, other Balahis have completed the data furnished by Gopal and have modified them. Finally, my own observations during four years of intimate living with the Balahis have been drawn upon.

The paper is divided into three sections: first, the remote and proximate preparation of the mother for childbirth; second, the birth of the child; third, childhood days.

I. PREPARATION OF THE MOTHER FOR CHILDBIRTH

1. *Remote Preparation. a. Introduction to Sexual Life.* The Balahis have for their young people, boys as well as girls, no official introduction to sexual life, such as an initiation ceremony. They attain an early knowledge of such matters from the talk and conduct of their parents and elder brothers and sisters, who speak quite freely and openly of such things even in their ordinary conversations. During the night, the parents, as also the married brothers and sisters and the smallest children, all sleep together in the same narrow hut. There the children see and hear everything that takes place, and so very early acquire a knowledge of sexual affairs. The ritual of birth-ceremonies and marriage-ceremonies contains songs about and favours the discussion of even the most intimate details of married life. The children are of course very interested listeners and are not excluded from such gatherings. The Balahis—as also all the other

¹ Further details are given in S. Fuchs, *Die Hochzeitsgebräuche der Balahis*, in *Anthropos*, 1937, 32:885-904.

castes—have many expressions, which they use very often, even in the most ordinary tasks and actions, and which have reference to the most familiar sexual actions, or their abuse. In times of excitement and anger or in quarrels the most shameful terms are used which leave hidden nothing regarding the sexual life. The children hear all these expressions very often daily, and use them too, at first not knowing the meaning, but that they also learn soon enough. And if there is still any thing lacking in their knowledge of such matters, the older boys or girls tell them or even mislead them to abuse of the same. Their parents frown at them for such deeds, it is true, but very indulgently. Indeed they often take delight in hearing how their little children utter such coarse expressions. "Look," they say, "how our little one can curse and swear although he is still so small!"

Sexual intercourse between boys and girls occurs, but not often, since they soon separate and do not play with each other.

The Balahis have no puberty ceremonies, nor have they any special ceremonies for reception into the caste.

b. The First Menstruation. Attainment of the age of puberty by the girls receives more attention. As soon as first menstruation occurs (*kapre siyai*), the girl is separated and placed in a corner of the house. There she has to remain hidden, and she must especially avoid being seen by men, even her nearest male relatives. She is not permitted to comb her hair or to clean herself. She is considered unclean, and all she touches becomes unclean also. She may not cook, or carry water. She gets her food separately from the rest. She is permitted to leave the house only for calls of nature. All this applies also to every following menstruation but in a more lenient form. During such periods women are never allowed to cook or to carry water for their household, but they may work in the fields, etc.

On the fourth or fifth day the girl goes, accompanied by the older womenfolk of the household, to the well or river, in order to purify herself. There she washes herself and her old clothes and puts on new ones. The women who helped her also wash themselves and change their clothes. Then they return home as cleansed.

Soon after the first menstruation, at the latest after the second or third, the girl goes to her husband. According to custom she has long since been married, but she has not yet lived with her boy-husband. This will begin now (cf. Fuchs, *loc. cit.*, III: die ana-Zeremonie). The people believe that unless the girl is brought to her husband and to sexual intercourse soon after her first menstruation, she will become sterile. But another reason for early consummation of the marriage is fear for the reputation of the girl. Sexual intercourse outside of marriage, especially if other consequences ensue, is a great dishonour and shame for the girl and her family. And the danger of some such thing is great, where so many male relatives live in the same house and room with her. The Balahis claim that after first menstruation strong sexual impulses arise in the girl, so that she begins to neglect her duties and work and soon gives way to such impulses and passions. For this reason she must immediately be brought to her husband, where she can satisfy such impulses in an honourable and legal manner. There is much truth in this when one considers the weak character and the inclination to sensuality of the Balahis. A strong motive for the early consummation of the marriage is also, that this custom is quite common among the higher castes and therefore imitated by the Balahis.

Old people still remember, however, the times when the girl was not brought to her husband or even married before her sixteenth year. They believe that early sexual intercourse has many evil consequences, that it weakens the physical strength of the young couple and that it produces only weak and sickly offspring. But custom decrees otherwise and no one will act against or contrary to customs and regulations.

2. *Proximate Preparation for Childbirth: Pregnancy.* Many premature births and miscarriages occur in the first years of married life. The young wife's body is not as yet fully developed and as a result is unable to bring forth healthy and strong children. So the first children born are weak and sickly and soon die. It is said that at least 40% of children born die within the first year after birth in India. If that holds good for all India, it certainly does for the Balahis, whose social and economical conditions are most unfavourable. However it can-

not be maintained that early pregnancy is for the Balahi-women a cause of sickness and sterility. The reason for this may be that they pass a great part of their time in the fresh air, working in the fields. Then the young wife is also often sent home to her parents, and there she can again recuperate. When her body is fully developed, she gives birth generally to healthy and robust children. The high mortality among these children is due largely to lack of care and hygiene as well as to the ever recurring malaria-fever of the mother who by suckling her child transfers the germs into his body. Such children generally do not die in the first year after birth, but later.

The Balahi women have as a rule many children. Although they age quickly, still they do not become sterile before the 35th year of age. They are often still bearing children after grown up daughters have had children of their own. It is not exceptional for a Balahi mother to give birth to ten children, but then the mortality of those children is also high. The Balahi wishes to have many children. Sterility is considered a disgrace and a curse of the gods. If they have no children they visit famous temples. The gods of fecundity are invoked. Cocoanuts mostly are offered to them under the sacred pipal tree (*ficus religiosa*). Sometimes they offer a miniature palang (native bed), which they either hang on the tree or place under it. They also have recourse to magic and sorcery. They go to the Barwa, the medicine man. The Barwa not infrequently advises them to set fire to a number of houses or grain-filled barns. When the flames arise, then the barren woman's desire will be fulfilled. Other sterile women try to get into their possession a saree (woman's veil) which has been soiled by the menstrual blood of another woman. They cut off the tip of it, burn it, and swallow the ashes. They believe that thus the fecundity of the other woman will also pass over to them. On account of this no woman will buy a saree which is not cut off straight at the end, because everyone will believe that the wearer of the same has been robbed of her fecundity. There are some who secretly obtain possession of the umbilical cord of a new-born baby and devour a piece of it. The child, the people think, must die, but his spirit will be born again in the barren woman who ate the

umbilical cord. Still others call the Sadhus (Indian monks) to pray and mutter invocations over them.

The Balahis understand the connection between conception and birth. They know that the body of the foetus is developed in the mother's womb during nine months time. This growth is described according to the ideas of the Balahis in a song, named manggal, which is sung during funeral festivities. In the first month the child is nirmal (similar to water). In the second month the blood is formed: palita (blood) khira (is formed). In the third month the blood becomes thick: ragat ka (blood) dala (thick). In the fourth month the flesh is formed: mas ka (of flesh) gola (ball). In the fifth month the hands and feet are developed: panch (foot) nang (hand) sidhare (develop). In the sixth month the body is completed: and ko (end) sidhare (completed). In the seventh month life and movement come into the body: ulad (reverse) muk (to move) chhula (to stir), the child turns and moves. In the eighth month the child bathes itself in the mother's womb: athyasi (foetus) ko nahe (to bathe), i. e., it swims in the nourishing liquid. Then in the ninth month the birth takes place: nau (ship) dwara (gate) paya (finds). The seventh month is a critical month, when many abortions and miscarriages take place. At that time the woman has to wear an amulet, which the Barwa hangs on her neck. It is not to be removed till after childbirth. After that it is thrown into the river. The Barwa, of course must receive some gifts in proportion to the means of the child's father. However should the amulet not help to ward off the abortion, then the trinket is cast away amidst invectives and much abusing. The Barwa also gets his share of curses. At this time the woman often makes vows, to make a pilgrimage, or gifts are given to a temple or sadhu.

The Balahis do not know where the soul of the child comes from. But they do say it comes from God. The Balahis like other Hindus believe in the transmigration of souls, but it seems they have adopted this doctrine only recently. Asked where his soul will go after death, the Balahi will invariably answer: "To heaven." To the suggestion of the possibility of his going to hell he replies that hell is only for wicked people, but "I am a good man (mein to garib atmi hung)". Seldom do they speak

of soul-transmigration. Only in answering a direct question about transmigration do they aver that the soul will be born anew.

II. BIRTH OF THE CHILD

1. *The Day of Birth.* As soon as the mother begins to feel the pangs of birth, she receives ghee (clarified butter) and urad (pulse) to eat. The midwife (dai) is then called in. The midwife is of the same caste, a Balahi. The Nimari-Balahis have midwives from their own caste, whilst the Katia-Balahis take them from the sweeper caste. These dais have no training whatsoever in obstetrics. They may have inherited their profession from their mothers. But any woman may practice midwifery. It is not necessary that she be in anyway more intelligent or trained or skilled than other women. On the contrary obstetrics is considered an "unclean work" and so a respectable woman will not lower herself to its practice. Generally women of somewhat low reputation in the caste perform such services for the pregnant mother.

When called for help the midwife puts on her worst and dirtiest rags, since they will become unclean through the touch of the woman in childbirth. As an only instrument she brings a sickle with her. Other women may also come but they lend their assistance only in extreme need, since they fear becoming unclean. The woman in childbirth squats on her heels on the ground. When the birth is easy, the dai has very little to do. And this is usually the case. The dai takes the child and with her sickle cuts the umbilical cord. This is called *nala katna*, i. e., to cut the tube, or pipe. If the baby is a boy, then the dai gets four annas at once, but if a girl, only two annas. The money has to be paid immediately, since it is an especially unclean work and must therefore be especially paid. The wound left by the cutting of the umbilical cord is rubbed with saffron (*haldi*) to prevent infection. If however the birth is a difficult one, the dai helps as well as she can with her hands. She massages, presses and pulls as she best knows how. If this does not help, she tries to tear the child from the womb of its mother whether it comes out alive or dead. If she does not succeed in this, child and mother are left to die.

Very seldom, a man who has some reputation as a quack may be called in. His eyes are blindfolded that he may not see the woman. He removes the child's body by parts, with his hands. However the mother too generally dies from the internal injuries received during the process. If the child is born dead or there is a miscarriage, the dai shows it to its father, but not to its mother. The remains are buried, without ceremonies, in some corner.

At childbirth the dai is sometimes called in to carry out illicit procedures. True, most Balahis like and want children. Even girls are desirable, for they can do much work before their marriage, and at the time of marriage they bring in a fair sum to the parents. Especially when many boys are in the family, girls also are wanted. But if the child is the result of illicit intercourse, for instance, in the case of the pregnancy of a widow, the dai is called to do away with the child. Medicine for abortifacient purposes is brought in from Ghonds and Korkoos or other hill tribes, who know how to prepare such mixtures from roots and plants of the jungle as will do away with the foetus before birth. If, however, such means do not have the desired result, more drastic ones are resorted to, namely, the dai is told to kill the newborn child. For this she must of course receive a special "tip". Sometimes also jealous concubines try to get rid of the babies of more fortunate partners in this way.

The Balahis call it an easy childbirth, when the head of the child comes out first. If the feet come first, it is a difficult one. To such children is later ascribed the power to draw the lightning bolts. During storms sexual intercourse is forbidden to them in the belief that lightning will immediately kill both man and wife. If the child is in a horizontal position, the case ends, almost without exception, in the death of mother and child.

If the delivery is successful, the placenta is secretly buried, that no other woman finding it may use it for a charm or for witchcraft. That would be fatal for the child's life. After this mother and child are bathed by the dai, with warm water prepared for that purpose. A palang (native bed) is placed somewhere in a dark corner of the house or the veranda. There the mother has to lie down for the following days. The baby is put

beside her and entirely covered with the same blanket as the mother. Later on it is placed in an improvised hammock made from old rags and suspended from the ceiling. A mat or blanket is often used as a curtain to hide mother and child from the evil eyes of the people and to keep away the fresh air which is considered as very harmful for a newborn child. Also evil spirits may enter and harm mother and child, if they are placed in a more exposed room.

After the delivery the dai washes herself and changes her clothes. Then she goes into the village and tells everybody about the birth. She comes back the next day and for five successive days, looking after the mother and child, since no one else will touch them, as being still unclean. For all the dai's services she receives about two rupees for a boy, one rupee four annas for a girl. She also often receives the dirty clothes of the woman in childbed.

As soon as the news of the birth is spread abroad, the men of the Balahi-quarters gather together. They bring with them the "sing", an instrument similar to a saxophone. If other musical instruments are available, these are also brought along. Now they go to the house of the child and play before it and sing. The father of the newborn child comes out and invites all to sit down and chew or smoke tobacco. Then he gives four or five rupees to the panch (village-council). This money is used to buy liquor. If the child's father is very poor he gives less, and also when the baby is a girl. The musicians receive about two pounds of joari, a kind of millet. This gift is called bhata. In addition they get another anna.

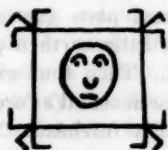
After the men come the women and girls, who dance and sing for about an hour. They receive some gurrh (cane-sugar) or sugar, then each a pound of joari and half an anna. After that they all go home. Then the men gather again to drink the liquor they have bought with the money. They also go to the brahman and inquire about the fate of the child and ask for a name. The brahman gives the name first and gets one to four annas for that. Then he opens his astrological books (panchang) and from the date and hour, and the position of the constellations at the moment of birth and other phenomena, foretells the future of

the child. If the father of the child does not get the brahman, he gives the name himself, but never his own name. That would mean ill fate or an early death to the father. The name of the child is later on changed for many reasons. One is, to deceive evil spirits who will forget him when his name is altered; another, in remembrance of a dead relative.

When the name-giving is done, the men go to the liquor-shop, the father of the child with the nearest relatives first. They drink in happy mood, what the father of the child can spend. Sometimes also other relatives add a bottle or two of the country-liquor to celebrate the happy event. This all will happen on the day of the birth, unless the birth took place late in the evening, in which case they come together the next morning.

The mother gets nothing to eat for the next two or three days. Only a sort of tea, called kaira-pani, is offered to her. After these three days she gets a gruel, made of sauria, gurrh and ghee. Only after the fifth day does she receive ordinary food again. The child also gets nothing the first three days, only its lips are sometimes moistened with cow-milk. Only on the fourth day is it allowed to suck its mother's breasts.

2. *The Fifth Day: Day of the Chatti-mata.* On the evening of the fifth day all the women of the Balahi-quarters meet again at the house of the mother. The feast of the Chatti or Bi mata is celebrated. Chatti mata is the goddess of fate. She will write the child's fate on its forehead during the coming night. The picture of the Chatti mata is painted on the wall with cow dung, in the chauk, i. e., the magical sign of the Balahis.

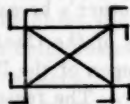


The drawer of the picture, a woman, now offers sacrifice to it (puja). She offers kuku (red paint) and rice, which are burned before the picture. Now all the women are fed, with joari-bread or rice. They talk with one another, sing and dance, to honor

the Chatti mata that she might be appeased and grant a favorable fate to the child.

3. *The Eleventh Day: Jawai pujana.* On the eleventh day the departure (jawai) of the goddess is celebrated by a sacrifice (pujana). In the meanwhile the parents or the older relatives of the child's mother have been informed of the happy birth. But it often happens that the mother of the child, when she feels the time of delivery nigh, goes to her mother's house, where she knows she will be better treated. In this case the relatives of the husband come to the celebration. In the first case the parents of the child's mother bring gifts: for the husband a turban, or a loincloth (dhoti), often also a shirt; for the child's mother a skirt, blouse and a saree (veil). If they are not without money, they also invite other relatives and even the whole village to the feast (barsa). After the festival meal the newborn child and his parents are clothed with the new garments. And then the following ceremony takes place.

A chauk is drawn before the door of the house.



On this chauk a lota, a small pear-shaped vessel of brass, is placed. A small coin (dhela) is thrown into it. Then a yoke is placed on the ground just before the chauk, and the parents of the child have to sit on it. The mother holds the child on her lap. Before them a brass plate (arti) is set, containing rice, kuku, and a dewani (a little earthen pot with oil and a wick in it). The wick is lit. Then four girls come and put kuku, the red paint, first on the husband's forehead, then on the young wife's and on the child's forehead. The wife's father gives the girls two annas. Next a loincloth is placed on the shoulders of the husband (the child's father), having a dhela tied in one of its corners. The wife's saree is joined to the man's dhoti. After a short time the barber (nai) loosens the knot and takes out the coin, which is intended for him.

This ceremony resembles that of the marriage ceremony and in reality is considered as a renewal of the same. Among the Balahis the marriage is only then really completed, after a child is born. Before this they are generally considered more as boy (choro) and girl (chori); but from then on as man and wife.

After this ceremony the young mother is again brought before the picture of the chatti mata. She has her child on her hip. The other women begin to sing:

Chal dewi mata wo, / man ka manora / pura kiya, / meri dewi wo ("Go divine mother thou, / the hearth's work / is finished, / my goddess thou").

The plain meaning is: Now depart, exalted goddess, what thou didst desire has been fulfilled.

The women often repeat these words, singing in melodious rhythms. After that they sing other songs and dance, till late in the night.

4. *The Twenty-first Day.* From the day of the delivery till the 21st and often the 31st day, or even for five weeks, the young mother may not be left alone. She remains unclean and may neither cook nor fetch water from the well. She should not even leave the house at all, for fear lest the evil spirits harm her or the child. But when she needs must leave the house, she must carry a sickle on her shoulder. At other times the sickle is left on the bed or under the blanket. This instrument is supposed to ward off sickness and the evil spirits. Also during illness the sickle is kept in the bed of the patient. Iron is supposed to possess a healing power and the evil spirits fear the cut of the sickle. So they say.

Although the mother may sometimes leave the house within this time, still the child is never brought into the open air, especially not when the sky is cloudy, for it is thought that the sultriness caused by cloudy weather may injure the child's health. The Balahis do not like it either if one stares at the children. Even the father may not see his child the first five days. Some women are supposed to have the evil eye and those with especially piercing looks are suspected as witches, although they really may be good persons. From the sight of these women the mothers protect their children even if they are several years

of age, because they think that such looks may harm them. Nor do the people like it if one speaks of the beauty or ugliness of a child, since then the attention of evil spirits may be called to the child. In this sense they say: "This woman has eaten my child (yeh aurat mere bachhe ko kaya),"—that is, the woman has made such a remark out of jealousy in order to harm the child.

On the 21st or 31st day after childbirth the mother and child are purified. The mother, accompanied by the other women of the house or kin, stands before the door of the hut. She then scatters joari kernels in all directions. She takes a small earthen vessel on her head and a brass vessel (lota) in her hand. The other women lead her now to the well or the water pool (nala). There she washes herself and changes her clothes and washes these also. Then she carries home the earthen vessel full of water. Arriving at home, she puts the vessel down and sweeps the whole house. She smears the walls and the floor with fresh cow dung. This is called lipna. Finally she makes the fire and then cooks the meal for the whole family for the first time since the delivery. Now she is clean and can perform all her customary household duties again.

III. CHILDHOOD DAYS

The mother nurses her child for about three years, or else till the next child comes, and if that is quite soon she may nurse them both. Gradually, however, the child is fed on other kinds of food besides its mother's milk. But the chief food remains the mother's milk, especially among the poor who have nothing else to eat than the very dry joari, which is entirely unsuitable and indigestible for a small child. In the case of twins, nearly always at least one of the babies dies, even when there is cow's milk in the house to substitute for the mother's milk.

But that is very seldom the case and so the weaker of the twins dies of mere starvation. Only after the death of the one will the other of the twins improve and grow. So the poor parents are glad if the one dies soon enough to save the life of the other child.

In the beginning the child is kept away from the fresh air as much as possible. In fact that it is not taken outside at all.

The people fear it might catch cold or that the evil spirits might harm it. Cleanliness and hygiene are never virtues of the Balahi women, including what pertains to nursing the child. So it often happens, that the child gets sore eyes or painful inflammations of the ears,—consequences of uncleanness and neglect. But when the child gets open wounds and worms enter into these wounds, then the child and all who touch it, become unclean. Before it may associate with others, it must be healed first and then be restored to the caste by a feast. The father of the child has to feed his fellow Balahis of the village and to pay a certain sum as penance. This is indeed a good means to teach the people more cleanliness and hygiene, since such a feast is very expensive. On clean clothes for the baby very little weight is laid. The Balahi women do not know the use of soap. So their washing is not very successful. But they do not bother about it. And the small children of the Balahis have nothing to complain of in the matter of overdressing. They get a shirt or a jacket, which is shortened in front in order to prevent it from getting too dirty. This is their only dress till their fifth or sixth year of age, and even this is not used every day. After the fifth or sixth year, sometimes later or earlier, the children get their first dhoti (loincloth) or skirt.

The Balahis like children, and the more they have the better pleased they are. A large family is considered a blessing of the gods and a reward for a good life. If no children come or if they die soon, then peace in the family is in danger. The man, if he has sufficient money, looks around for a second wife. If only girls come, then too he will take a second wife. For sons are the hope of old age. They will support the parents, when the latter cannot work any more. Girls are wanted also, but only after the birth of a boy. Especially the mother wants them, to help her later on in her household duties and in taking care of the younger children.

The Balahis do not bother themselves much about the training of their children. When they are still very young, they naturally cause the mother much trouble and care, but as soon as they can crawl, they are left to themselves or to the care of the older children. The Balahis scarcely kiss or hug their chil-

dren. But it is still more seldom that they strike them, when they are naughty. At most they give them a scowl, since they fear if they do more, the children might not take care of them in their old age. So they say. As soon as the children are older, the girls and boys separate and play only to themselves. At an early age they have to begin to work. The boys generally take care of the cattle and pasture them, or help in the fields. The girls help the mother in the house; very often they also go and work in the fields. As most of the Balahis have no fields of their own, but are employed as menials, so also are their children. Child-labour is not yet prohibited in India. That means a lot of hardship for the Balahi children who naturally prefer to play, but have sometimes to work as much as the grown-up people for half wages.

The sons, even after marriage, remain in the paternal home. At most they build an extension to the old house, or partition off a corner, for their own family. What one earns, belongs to all. The father is the master of the house. However if he is too old and weak or if he dies, all his rights pass over to the eldest son. His brothers and sisters and even his mother have to obey him. But as a rule soon after the death of the father, the married brothers separate, to avoid quarrels and differences. However the ideal is to be all together, in one large family, where parents, children and grandchildren live all peacefully together. This gives an impression of prosperity and vigorous life. The girls, of course, have to leave the paternal home as soon as they are mature.

The sons obtain a voice in the village-council only after the death of their father. An exception, however, is not impossible. A man, specially talented or clever in speaking, may be listened to in the village-council, but he must always expect to be silenced by the other members of the council, first of all by his own father. An official reception, or initiation, into the caste or the village-council is not known. The influence of a man in the panch (caste-council) is proportionate to his personal ability and cleverness, to the number of his relatives, and to the largeness of his possessions.

The passing from childhood to youth and from youth to manhood is gradual and without outward ceremonies.

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